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Workforce Series #2

How to Write Your Resume

By Carolyn Clague, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Extension Youth Development / 4-H Specialist

What is a Resume?

A resume is an accurate description of who you are in the workforce—where you have worked, what you have done, and when you did it. It is a brief one or two page summary of your background that provides an employer with information regarding your education, work experience, achievements, skills, special knowledge, and training.

The main purpose of a resume is to make employers interested in learning more about you. Your resume is meant to get you past the initial screening so that you have an opportunity to be interviewed by someone who has the power to hire you. For some jobs, you may also have to fill out a job application form. The job application does not replace the resume. It provides the basic facts about you, but it does not show your personality, and you still need to write a resume and a cover letter.

Resume Writing Tips

A resume is a business document. It should look professional and be neat, clear, concise, and error-free. Here are some writing tips for resumes:

- Do not use the first person pronoun, “I.” Instead, use short, easy-to-read paragraphs, starting with action verbs when describing your work. Examples of action verbs are: analyzed, coordinated, designed, directed, guided, initiated, modeled, organized, presented, and supervised. Describe actual accomplishments rather than general duties.
- Structure all the entries in a similar way. Consistency helps to clarify. Strive for precision. Every word counts. Resumes should contain short, crisp statements that do not have to be complete sentences. Take time to search for just the right words to describe your unique attributes and experiences.

Suggested Sections

The following are suggested sections that you may want to include in your resume. Typical sections and their sequence are: heading, employment objective, summary

of skills / qualifications, work experience, education, and other.

There are no absolute rules about what the resume should look like. It should be a reflection of who you are and what you can do. You can use the section names suggested here, or other names that are more descriptive of the kind of person you are and the employee you see yourself to be.

The sequence of the sections can also be changed to fit your situation. For example, if you are a recent college graduate with little work experience, you should list “education” before “experience.”

Heading

The heading includes your name, address, appropriate phone number(s), and e-mail address. The heading should be at the top of the resume and it usually looks best when centered.

A general rule is to omit your current work number in the heading, even if your employer is aware that you are looking for another job.

Employment Objective

An employment objective is used to tell an employer specifically what you want to do for them. This is where you say, “Here’s what I’d like to bring or can do for your business or organization.” The employment objective should state the position you are interested in and how your skills can match it. The statement is short—no more than two sentences—and simple. Examples are: “Chef position where I can contribute my skills as a hard worker and creative cook” or “Seeking position as a carpenter in which I can apply my drafting, remodeling, and woodworking skills.”

Consider using an objective only when you are certain that you want one type of job and you are not interested in talking to anyone about a different position with the company. You can also write an objective that targets a specific employer without mentioning a job type. Never

include an objective when you intend to use only one resume version and send it to a variety of employers offering a variety of positions.

Skills Summary / Qualifications

To sell yourself to an employer, write a list of three to five skills at the top of your resume under the heading “Skills Summary” or “Qualifications.” This section summarizes the strongest characteristics that you can offer your employer. Specify your outstanding skills and/or give examples of positive results.

Skills statements are based on what employers or others have told you that they perceive as your greatest strengths. The list may also include recent certifications, on-the-job training that you have completed, additional schooling that you have taken to improve job proficiency, accomplishments or recognition you have received, talents that you have, or what you are most proud of about yourself and work.

Example skills statements are the following: awarded employee of the month, commended for strong customer service skills, increased sales, or saved company debt costs through implementation of new computer software. The skills statements demonstrate recognition by a supervisor or positive results that make you valuable for a company. This section can also include computer programs and types of computer hardware you have worked on, foreign languages proficiency, or other special abilities you have developed, if these skills are relevant to the position.

Work Experience

List work experiences on your resume beginning with your current or most recent position. Each entry should include a position title, name and location of employer, and dates of employment. For current positions, write, for example, “2000–present.” Arrange the components in exactly the same way for each entry to obtain consistency.

With each job, write several phrases describing your responsibilities, duties, and accomplishments. Briefly describe both the broad responsibility of the job and the specific tasks or duties that you performed as part of that responsibility. Call attention to your accomplishments. Use interesting action verbs or verb phrases to demonstrate how innovative and proactive you are. Examples of action verbs are: analyzed, accomplished, created, customized, developed, devised, evaluated, guided, improved, initiated, increased, modified, provided, selected, served, or validated. Try to state positive results that you achieved for the company. Determine exactly what you accomplished and then use wording that emphasizes those accomplishments.

Emphasize your work history for the last two or three previous jobs as these are the work experiences that most likely will be relevant to your next job. If your work experience consists mostly of summer jobs and

unpaid internships, emphasize your willingness to learn and your capacity for hard work.

Education

For most resumes, education follows work experience. However, you should consider your individual situation, the requirements for the job, and how closely your experience fits the job. The strongest selling point should be stated first and in some cases that will be education. New college graduates should almost always put education before experience.

Under this heading, list the names of schools that you have attended, along with the degree or certificate you received. Never claim a degree that you have not earned; if you are lacking a thesis or a few hours of coursework, state this clearly. Include any additional training you have received, such as workshops, seminars, or courses that have increased your abilities to do the job. Mention your grade point average only if it is very high. Honors are stated only if they are highly regarded in your field or if you are a recent graduate.

Other

This section of the resume can contain any number of items depending on your background and the kind of position you are seeking. It may include special skills, computer skills, or language proficiency—anything that might enhance your appeal to a prospective employer. In this section, you can also list information about any professional affiliations or organizations in which you have membership.

Personal Information

Because of current discrimination laws, it is not appropriate to include personal information such as age, birth date, height and weight, health, marital status, number of children, race, religion, salary history, etc. on a resume. However, an exception might be personal information that is relevant for the job. For example, if the job requires working with children, you can include that you enjoy volunteering for specific community activities and attending them with your two children.

Consider using some of these words to describe your best personal qualities: adaptable, ambitious, active, creative, conscientious, dependable, efficient, energetic, loyal, practical, realistic, respected, sincere, willing to relocate, and willing to travel.

Volunteer Activities

Volunteer activities can be listed under “other” or under a special heading if they are extensive and relevant to the position. Including volunteer activities can help to present you as an innovative, take-charge person if you describe duties and accomplishments that could be valuable in the workplace. Volunteer activities demonstrates your commitment and support to the community. Your involvement shows that you are building skills that can

apply to a paid job. Volunteer involvement with a church should be described in a nondenominational way.

Hobbies or Interests

If your hobbies or favorite leisure activities are career-related or reveal some aspect of your personality that could shed positive light on your personal qualities, then list two to four of them at the end of your resume.

References or Letters of Recommendation

In most cases, employers will request references or names of people knowledgeable of your work skills who will speak about you or write a letter of recommendation.

When the employer contacts you, you should have identified your references and possibly, depending on their preference, they may have already written an evaluation of your character and performance.

However, it is suggested that you provide the names and contact information of three to four references with your resume. This enables the employer to make immediate contact with these individuals. You need to provide the following information: name, current job title or position, work address, e-mail address, and work phone number.

Keep in mind that your references should not be surprised or annoyed that you have used their names. You need to obtain their permission before listing them on your resume. You'll want to ask individuals such as a previous employer, supervisor, co-worker, school official, teacher or coach, pastor, community leader, etc. who will speak favorably of you. Remember that the employer or reference may want to handle comments in a confidential manner. Be sensitive to the desires of both parties as to their preferences.

Appearance of Resume

Use 8 1/2" x 11" white, off-white, or ivory paper with black ink and all margins at least 1 inch wide. Do not use colored paper. The typeface should be simple, unadorned, and easy to read. Keep graphic flourishes such as bullets and boldface to a minimum or avoid completely if the resume is destined for an optical scanner. Your resume should be one page, unless you have a lot of work experience. Do not include references on your resume; they should be listed on a separate sheet of paper. Number or paginate each page at the bottom or at the top. Clearly identify your documents by stating your last name with the page number on each page.

Make sure to provide employers with easy-to-read, clean copies. Your best option is to customize your resume to

the specific job opening and print it out on a laser printer. You can also take your original to a printer or photocopy your resume on a high quality photocopier.

Consider asking someone who has good writing skills to proofread your resume and make suggestions. There should be no typos or misspelled words. Envelopes should be typed or very neatly printed. If including more than one sheet of paper, all should be on matching paper. Keep copies of everything to refer to when interviewing and writing follow-up letters.

Electronic Resumes

If you are proficient at using the Internet and particularly if you are aiming for a high-tech job and are not concerned about confidentiality, then sending an e-resume is a good idea. To transmit, convert your resume to a text version that can be read on any computer. "Plain" text is usually safest and is often called for in job ads. It is a good practice to follow up your e-resume by sending a printed copy in the mail. This may seem repetitious, but it is good insurance. Consider sending your e-resume to several friends before sending it to a firm. Your friends can tell you if the format is readable when viewed on various kinds of computers.

Multiple Resumes

The more closely the content of your resume matches the qualifications an employer is seeking, the greater the chances are that your resume will survive the initial screening process and that you will be interviewed. Consider preparing several resumes, each keyed to the various positions you will be going after in your job search; or compose a single resume, but be prepared to customize it to specific job openings.

Remember that your resume is an accurate representation of your qualifications, professional and educational background, skills, and attributes. You cannot change the basic facts of your background: who you worked for, what you did, and where you went to school. Dishonesty can keep you from getting the job or can get you fired. Writing and speaking the truth is always the best policy.

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